DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 170 207 SO 011 657

AUTHOR Vallance, Elizabeth
TITLE A Deadpan Look at Humor in Curriculum Theory (Or, The Serious vs. the Solemn).
PUB DATE Apr 79
NOTE 16p.; Paper presented at Annual Conference of the American Educational Research Association (San Francisco, California, April 1979)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Adoption (Ideas); Adult Education; American Culture; Attitudes; Bias; Changing Attitudes; Concept Formation; *Curriculum Development; *Educational Needs; *Educational Research; Elementary Secondary Education; Higher Education; *Humor; *Irony; *Mental Rigidity; Nonverbal Communication; Research Needs; Research Problems

ABSTRACT

Educational researchers can provide unusual perspectives to their research if they include humor and irony. Looking at topics from the reverse (the critical attitude, the aesthetic perspective) allows researchers to see patterns, details, and meanings which are normally hidden from view. This aesthetic perspective enables artists, critics, and researchers to find something compelling in ordinary situations. It is essential that artists and researchers discern aesthetically interesting patterns before they transmit the patterns to readers or viewers. Because educators and educational researchers are more likely to judge research and teaching methods by scientific criteria (reliability, validity, replicability, etc.) than by aesthetic criteria, their research seldom encourages new and aesthetically pleasing perspectives. The columnist Russell Baker is one example of a writer who has made the distinction between the serious (traditional, influential, non-defensive), the solemn (pretentious, self-conscious), and the humorous. Baker characterizes Americans as possessing a solemn national attitude. Certainly, educational researchers exhibit this same shortcoming to a considerable degree. Educational researchers will improve their research if they consider distinctions between serious and solemn topics and if they apply these distinctions as criteria in judging research problems, research methodology, and teaching methods. (DB)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Elizabeth Vallance

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC) AND USERS OF THE ERIC SYSTEM."

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

A Deadpan Look at Humor in Curriculum Theory
(Or, The Serious vs. the Solemn)

by
Elizabeth Vallance
Kansas State University

Paper Presented at AERA Annual Conference
San Francisco, California; April, 1979 Session # 33.10

ED170207

Introduction

I will begin on a solemn note, as follows:

On the whole, those of us who attend these annual gatherings are pretty heavily immersed in the goings-on in some form or another. Most of us are anxious to stake our claims in the business at hand, noting what needs commenting on later, renewing our contracts with (and perhaps our belief in) our respective disciplines. Later we'll try to get our papers refereed and published. The triennial "travesties" talks at AERA are our only formally sanctioned occasion to laugh at ourselves and to reshuffle our perspectives a bit, and they respond nicely to Jim March's eloquent argument for "playfulness" in our attitudes to and perspectives on research. Aside from this infrequent bit of self-mocking, however, we take our research very seriously, and though we are willing enough to criticize individual research or paradigms, we rarely lift our gaze high enough to look down and discover the sometimes truly humorous qualities of our collective struggles. We act as though it all mattered a great deal.

This paper is a chance to invite all of us to try a different perspective on educational research, particularly curriculum research and one other area (continuing education) I will draw on. I must admit to some astonishment at learning that of the two papers I submitted to Division B this year, it was this one (and not the standard heavy piece proposed in the other) that was enthusiastically accepted.

SP 011 657

It seemed a good sign, and I am curious to see where we can go with a sanction to look for the humorous.

Aesthetics and Russell Baker

Two bodies of thought underlie the ideas to be developed here. The first is the large body of literature attempting to define the "aesthetic perspective", especially that frame of mind common to both artistic creativity and humor, the view from the outside that allows us to see familiar things from a new and revealing perspective. The second is a brief piece that Russell Baker wrote in the New York Times Sunday magazine last spring entitled "Why Being Serious is Hard". I shall maintain that the ability to make the distinction between what Baker calls the serious and the solemn is in itself something of a creative act (especially when it involves critiquing our own efforts) and that the result of doing so can be to reveal a heretofore unnoticed humorousness in much of what we do. Merely to follow my arguments may require some degree of willing suspension of disbelief and a somewhat sacrilegious view of educational research. I think this might be healthy.

First, a few words on what the aestheticians mean by looking at things "from the reverse" (or in whatever terms they describe this critical attitude). Long dissertations could be done on this point (my own was one of them), but I think the central issues can be phrased fairly simply. Looking at things "from the reverse", from an unusual perspective, and seeing in them patterns or details or meanings that are normally hidden from view, is the starting point of art, and of art appreciation. This aesthetic perspective, or ability to find something compelling in very ordinary situations, is essential to both the artist and the viewer (the latter including both critics and casual viewers). Most of us are one or the other. The artist must be able to discern aesthetically interesting patterns within his or her own experience before ever attempting to render them in a medium, whether in paint, photography, dance, or etc. The critic (and viewer),

in turn, must be able -- if not to discern such patterns initially -- to recognize them when presented with them (in a painting, photograph, dance movement, etc.). The viewer's job is to be open enough to these rearrangements of the familiar world to see in the artist's work the beauty, or the grace, or the humor, or whatever, of what the artist has rendered. When the work is reviewed, the critic's job goes farther; he or she must be able to recognize and see how the artist has interpreted experience, but must also attempt to "render" (in Max Kozloff's words) that artistic treatment of experience back into a familiar language accessible to the untutored viewer; most often, that language is simply everyday language. How this perspective is developed concerns me less at the moment than the nature of the insights it allows.

Thus, for example, a photographer may see a compelling beauty in an arrangement of colorful milk crates behind a store and produce a prize-winning picture; the owner of the store, long since inured to any interesting qualities in milk crates, had never looked at them in that way but, because the photograph was carefully and well composed, could appreciate both the beauty and the humor in it. The aesthetic perspective of the photographer (shared by the critics, who awarded the prize) was, in this instance, communicated -- through the artistic medium -- to an otherwise untutored viewer. The result, in this case (and this is important), was a genuine chuckle. Though not all artistic works produce laughter, and many do not aim at that, my interest here is in those cases where this special new perspective <u>can</u> allow us to laugh at things we had always taken very seriously or had not really noticed at all.

But educators are not given to seeking aesthetically pleasing (<u>or</u> humorous) rearrangements of their hard-won arguments and research findings. Our criticisms of our mutual endeavors stem from a single (if loose) set of criteria drawn from "hard science" research and referring to such values as reliability, validity, replicability,

generalizability, relevance, importance, and truth. Few of these encourage us to laugh, ever, and only rarely does this approach to criticism lead to the "aha" of recognition -- the sudden re-arrangement -- that the aesthetic perspective allows. Russell Baker's serious/solemn distinction, which slices the world differently than we are used to doing, may provide a vehicle to free us to see our efforts from a perspective quite different from the usual one.

Baker's article is, as usual, clever, astute, and more succinct than some of us are used to reading (or writing). He never defines either "serious" or "solemn", a fortunate omission which leaves open both the boundaries of the concepts and rules for applying them. He informs strictly by example. Thus: Chicago, he says, is serious, while California is solemn; the New Yorker is serious, but Playboy is solemn; S.J. Perelman is serious, Norman Mailer is solemn; Bogart movies about private eyes are serious, but modern spoofs of these movies are solemn; New York is serious, Washington is solemn; Adlai Stevenson was serious, and was easily overwhelmed by Dwight Eisenhower, who was solemn; children are serious, while adults tend to be solemn. Poker is serious, but jogging is very solemn. And so on.

Baker claims that solemnity is "the national attitude", and that while we make much fuss about valuing serious things, most of us prefer people and things that are solemn (Stevenson lost, after all). It is much easier to be solemn, he says, for the rules and models for doing so are implicit everywhere -- the absence of seriousness in airport bookracks, in American-made automobiles, in the public schools, in the shopping centers can be traced (he says) to the demands made by the American mass audience, and its taste is not for the serious.

In order to describe what this "national attitude" really is, and to see how it might apply to educational work, let us try to identify some common denominators merely in the popular examples Baker offers. I have toyed with a few, and

I'll start with some that don't work. Serious and solemn seem not to be distinguished on the basis of "good" vs. "bad", however vaguely defined, for jogging (solemn) cannot be bad and Normal Mailer (solemn) is delightful (obnoxious or not) and an excellent writer. Conversely, New York and Chicago (both serious) aren't inherently any "better" than Washington. Nor is the distinction related to things being "good for you" or not: poker probably isn't inherently growth-oriented, and Las Vegas (which is serious) isn't demonstrably better for people than Miami Beach is, and Miami Beach (he says) is solemn. Also, it is essential to point out that Baker's distinctions don't always coincide with my own personal preferences: I prefer New York (which is serious) to Miami Beach (solemn), but I would choose jogging (solemn) over poker (serious) if I had to. Personal predilection alone does not account for my agreeing with Baker's distinctions. Other possible criteria which turn out not to explain the difference include cost, current popularity, "excellence" (by any definition), importance (likewise), usefulness, and tastefulness. None of these seems to lead to a consistent pattern in line with Baker's, and yet still I sense a real rightness to what he is saying. There is a common denominator somewhere.

I suggest one which is best phrased as a set of synonyms for the "solemn" end of the continuum: the solemn is self-conscious, tries hard to be "taken seriously", and is at least a bit pretentious. We do, as Baker says, make much of seriousness; we also like to think our own life's work is serious. But some of what we normally consider serious may well be, on closer scrutiny, rather pretentious (though it may still be quite valuable); we might be able to acknowledge a self-conscious quality in it; we may be able to admit that we are still trying to establish its seriousness, though it is not quite there yet. In short, some of what we do may still be somewhat solemn. To acknowledge even this much, however, may be the small opening we need to identify the humorous in some of our work. In fact, much of what is humorous in art derives from the artist's deliberately making

a self-conscious new statement about something we are quite familiar with. In any case, the object revealed in a new and perhaps humorous light can be laughed at without destroying its inherent value. Thus, in our example, the photo of milk crates took a very ordinary and serviceable (serious) set of objects and re-arranged them into a work of art. The pretense that milk crates are in any way artistic is a solemn kind of claim to make; it forces us to look at them differently by claiming for them an aesthetic identity not normally accorded them. The result, in this case, is that they look funny -- likeable in a new way. The store owner laughing at the photo in no way diminished the value of the crates -- quite the opposite, if anything.

Let's try this definition briefly on Baker's examples and then move on to others. California does seem to try very hard, nourishes cults and movements that make statements about their lifestyles, and seems very aware of itself; New York, too, is famously self-conscious, but it needn't try hard at all to be taken seriously: it is an institution. And where the New Yorker magazine is serious (and low-key in its high-class way), Playboy (with its tired and relentless "Playboy philosophy") is solemnly self-conscious: it begs to be accepted as legitimate. Bogart movie spoofs are deliberately self-conscious, hence solemn. So are most fads, of which jogging is one, its self-consciousness manifest in shopwindow displays of jogging books -- there may be books on poker, but they are secure in the back shelves under "Games". Norman Mailer may be the most self-conscious of contemporary writers, and his egocentric pretentiousness is one of the charming attributes that sell his books; it also makes him "solemn". S.J. Perelman seems more eternal, and survives quite nicely without the exhibitionism -- he is "serious". And so on. The solemn tries hard, is aware of the struggle, and needs to claim for itself more importance than it has yet truly merited. It is pretentious in its struggle to establish itself. It provides its own fanfare.

The serious, on the other hand, is generally non-defensive: serious things are clearly visible without a struggle to the surface, are accepted on grounds of tradition or endurance or something besides current fashion, and they seem to influence us whether we seek them or not. They can usually survive without fanfare. Thus, poker is serious -- it goes on in back rooms all over America even without special togs and how-to-do-it books and feature stories. Children don't read books about how to be children. And so on.

Some applications of the distinction to other bits of Americana may help to expand the concept. Try these, for example: Edward Hopper (painter of lonely American scenes) is serious; Philip Slater (author of The Pursuit of Loneliness) is solemn. Work boots are serious; Earth Shoes are solemn. Woody Allen (especially his "funny" movies about adult hang-ups) is serious; Gail Sheehy (and her taxonomy of adult "passages") is solemn. Ben Shahn (the artist) was a serious social critic; Charles Reich (best-selling critic) is solemn. Richard Avedon is a serious portraitist of people's aloneness; Diane Arbus, seeking out lonely spaces and lost people, was solemn, maybe. Going to movies (and enjoying them) is serious; majoring in "Popular Culture" is solemn. "Hints from Heloise" may be serious communication between trapped housewives; Ms. magazine, viewing everything through feminist filters, is solemn indeed, I'm sorry to say. Talking things over with someone can be serious, but calling it "sharing" is solemn. Friendship is serious; encounter groups are solemn. Changing jobs is serious; "having a mid-life crisis" may be solemn. Divorce is serious; Open Marriages are solemn. Putting honey in your tea is serious; putting it in your coffee, too, can only be solemn.

The serious and the solemn in education: is there any humor there?

Educators, rightly accused of communicating in a dreadfully stilted and pretentious language called "educationese", probably have the least jolly profile of any discipline (save, perhaps, economists and political scientists). This accusation is not without foundation, but I suspect that educators may actually have a very humorous thing going and not even recognize it. Applying Baker's

distinction might help us to find it.

I will draw my examples from two sub-disciplines of education -- curriculum, and continuing (or adult) education -- but must preface them with some commentary. Curriculum is the field which trained me; continuing education is the field that pays me. They share some rather unexpected similarities. Both are eclectic fields, dependent for their coherence on other disciplines to supply the substance of the program they design. Both curriculum and continuing education, being "process"-oriented fields, would cease to exist if (for example) history, English, auto mechanics and etc. vanished. And both, because of this, command a broad view of the phenomena of education: both are generalistic fields, demanding of their practitioners a familiarity with (if not scholarship in) areas which are disciplines in their own right -- psychology, administration, history & policy, evaluation & measurement, and so on. But most striking about both areas is that both disciplines (despite their long traditions) are struggling mightily to define themselves, to establish their respective legitimacies. Curriculum perhaps especially, and certainly with some gusto: we have a special interest group on "Creation & Utilization of Knowledge", a concern that can hardly be in the forefront of more secure disciplines like (say) physics, and the discipline is so self-conscious that a DivisionB keynote speaker recently felt called upon to proclaim that it was dead, or ought to be -- a strange way to establish a discipline perhaps, but a clear indication of the need for boundaries. Likewise, the field of continuing education, floating easily along for decades administering night-school programs and other adult education opportunities, has now latched onto the new rubric called Lifelong Learning, which (with big federal bucks behind it) may afford a new respectability (and even some new degree programs) to a very old practice. It is possible to argue that there is something of the solemn in both disciplines generally, simply in the quality of the rhetoric in each. Well-intentioned confusion is visible in both disciplines, though they address their confusion in characteristically different ways: the curriculum field abounds in

cogent and articulate theorizing, boundary-marking, and even proclamations of non-existence; the continuing education field teaches adults how to develop and teach adult courses. The one field addresses its confusion at the theoretical level, the other resolves (or escapes) it by focusing on the practical. At both levels, however, we can see distinctions between the serious and the solemn; the two disciplines, between them, provide a fair sampling of the subject matter of education. The examples of the serious/solemn distinction, then, will come from both fields.

From continuing education, first: night-school courses (giving or taking them) are serious, and a venerable tradition; the concept of "lifelong learning" is solemn. Reading for pleasure is serious; defining this activity as an example of "self-motivated independent adult learning" is solemn, and probably a co-optation of a very normal and good activity. Providing courses to adults is serious; teaching courses in "how adults learn" is solemn (as is the course I teach called "theory & practice of continuing education", since as far as I can determine this <u>is</u> no known theory of continuing education). From the general field of curriculum: trying to understand the outcomes of schooling is serious; trying to measure them all "behaviorally" is solemn. Responsibility is serious; accountability (as a legislated concept) is solemn. The recognition of individual differences in learning styles is serious; any of the methods of individualized instruction, such as contract learning or computer-assisted instruction, may be solemn when applied as a panacea. Schwab's taxonomy of the ways in which curriculists can remove themselves from their real object of study is serious, and has serious implications; the reconstructionists, holding separatist conferences, are solemn. Teaching is serious, always; research aimed at defining and controlling effective teaching can be quite solemn. Evaluation of any kind is serious, or should be; pleas for either behavioral measurement <u>or</u> qualitative approaches to evaluation tend to be phrased solemnly (though I am in the latter camp). Curriculum theorizing as a whole is fairly serious, and seems to be necessary for imposing order on a divergent

field; any one theory, to the extent that it knowingly oversimplifies reality for the sake of elegance, is solemn. Concern about literacy is serious; "back to basics" is solemn, especially if it implies a retreat to the good old days. Chalking things up to experience is serious; awarding college credit for "prior learning" is solemn.

The above are some possibilities, offered as a stimulus to further thought about the matter. The physical sciences are secure and serious; the social sciences seem to still be defensive and self-conscious, though they have improved in recent years -- they are still somewhat solemn. One of the most endearing characteristics of the experimental psychologists, in my view, has been their ability to appreciate the solemnity and humor of "rat psychology" research and related endeavors; a noted psychologist at Michigan has even published a small periodical he calls The Wormrunner's Digest, an admission of the (on-one-level) absurdity of devoting one's life to the study of a small flatworm called planaria. This ability to look at one's discipline though one were an outsider looking in in some bewilderment is what I <u>think</u> the serious/solemn paradigm may help to foster. Let's look a bit more closely at some general guidelines for applying the distinction to education, particularly to curriculum.

There are at least 3 dimensions of the educational disciplines that might bear scrutiny in this way: the <u>problems</u> selected for study, the <u>methods</u> by which the research is conducted, and <u>practices</u> implemented in the schools (through teacher training or by legislative flat). I suggest that in each of these dimensions, a different kind of question may be asked in order to distinguish the relative degrees of seriousness and solemnity. These questions are such as might be asked by an inquisitive and dumbfounded outsider, who (unlike the researcher or practitioner him/herself) is not committed to accepting the activity as necessarily something that matters; let us assume too that the outsider phrasing the

question is quite prepared to laugh off the activity if the answer is not satisfying.

On the problems we address in our research: We might well ask, as does the mystified lay person wondering why so much money is being spent to study the behavior of microscopic flatworms, "But does it, in the grand scheme of things, really matter?" Is the relevance of this activity to any improvement in the human condition really obvious? Bear in mind that the answer might well be No, but that the problem may still be worth pursuing by a host of other criteria; it would at least allow us to stop and put the thing in a clearer perspective, and it very often might let us laugh at ourselves. Thus, for example, does it obviously matter what the "Kohlberg level of moral functioning of protagonists in Newberry Award-winning fiction"* is? Perhaps not: the generalizability of such a problem to larger educational problems may not be obvious; the question may look quite trivial (though I find it fascinating), and of course it is up to the researcher to demonstrate that it is not. It may in itself not be a serious problem at all, and though it might be quite serious in the context of a broader research plan, it might be useful (and honest) to acknowledge the solemnity of this particular question. (I happen to find the solemnity of this and many other titles really quite charming, in fact).

On the methods used to investigate educational problems: It is reasonable to ask how much we are distorting a phenomenon in order to study it. Are we re-structuring the world in order to make it fit how we think it "really" is? Of course all experimental research, with controls & variables, must do this to some extent; but surely there is a point beyond which we must acknowledge the pretentiousness of the design (regardless of how defensible the design might be by other criteria). Thus, for example, some researchers at Stanford a few years ago were studying teaching by locking a teacher in a sterile cubicle with a pupil he/she had never seen before. They had so re-structured the concept of "teaching" that it now referred only to the interaction between an adult and a child, with some curriculum materials; the fact that

*From the 1978 AERA conference program (Session 8.19; Bernard Rihn)

all real teaching occurs in situations in all ways antithetical to this setting was deliberately ignored. All this activity struck me at the time as very solemn, and the more I reflect back on it the funnier it seems to me, though I remain fully aware that important knowledge was being gained. "Rat psychology" has become the standard butt of jokes and cartoons because this discipline has so structured its definition of human behavior that rodents seem a perfectly appropriate substitute for college students. The man who published The Wormrunner's Digest saw this point in time to say it himself, first.

Of the educational practices we implement, evaluate, and try to improve on, we can well ask "Is it perhaps pretentious? Would we really dare to prescribe this across the board if we had the power to do so?" Like most or the examples that Russell Baker used in making his point, solemn practices in education are those which are ultimately pretentious, which claim more than they can deliver. Many "movements" are open to this charge, and need to be assessed against that criterion. Thus, it might be claimed that the back-to-basics movement is pretentious in its assumption that literacy and other basic skills can effectively be taught in schools even in a culture which seems to encourage TV, calculators and clever misspellings: would we really dare to commit all our educational resources to this philosophy of schooling? Are we that sure that schools can solve the problem? It is a pretentious and optimistic assumption; I would call it solemn. Also, while there is clearly a serious demand for out-of-school instruction for adults wanting new skills, trades or general knowledge, it is highly pretentious to try to operate under a rubric so broad as Lifelong Learning. Useful as the label may be for funders, it seems quite meaningless both for individual learning choices and for curriculum planners. We would never really dare to apply the concept: neither learner nor curriculist will ever have the moxie to embark on the design of a lifelong curriculum, even if such a curriculum could withstand the onslaughts of time. As a guide to curriculum planning, the concept is solemn.

In addition to the three sets of questions outlined above, I can think of some other gimmicks that might help us to distinguish the solemn from the serious in educational research. The first I mention because I strongly believe it warrants attacking and because I think it blurs some necessary distinctions between serious and solemn educational writing: we should beware of that distortion of English which results in sentences like the following: "Mackie's study was in the psychological education mode"* or "the predictive model provides useful evidence of the correlation relationships between ratings and learning"**. Weighty educational jargon in which so much of our work is phrased is dangerous in two respects: it gives (or tries to give) undue weight to a lot of solemn arguments or allegations which otherwise would lack substance, but it can also camouflage truly serious and important ideas in the sometimes mindless patina that the jargon provides. Beneath the layers of verbiage there could be either a good serious idea struggling to break free, or a less valuable solemn point trying to hard to be taken seriously. Both possibilities are dangerous in different ways, but I think history suggests that the truly great ideas are outnumbered by the others; therefore, we should be suspicious of anything written in educationese, and take it as an invitation to suspect a tragic solemnity.

A second means of identifying the solemn in our various projects might be to estimate (somehow) their suitability for the theater of the absurd. Thus, one could say that while a serious concern such as effective teaching lacks the peculiar saliency of an absurdist theatrical idea, a teacher and a child stranger isolated in a "teaching cubicle" (a solemn situation) is really quite excellent (and rather like Sartre's "No Exit" or especially Ionesco's "The Lesson"). Or, a person in the process of switching careers might be too "serious" a situation to sustain in an absurdist theatrical setting, but I can easily picture a Life-Planning Workshop as the only set on such a stage, as I can also imagine a crazed scientist trying to develop a competency-based test that could certify Picasso as an artist.

*Alan J. Lockwood in Review of Educational Research 48:3, Summer 1978, p.357.
**John A. Centra in American Educational Research Journal 14:1, Winter 1977, p. 18.

A sort of conclusion

I have taken this idea through fourteen pages now, probably more than it can stand on the first go-around. At this point I'll leave it with you to play with or to reject.

I want to reiterate that the serious/solemn distinction does not follow lines of importance or inherent worth. It does not imply a judgment as to what research is worth pursuing and which not. Much of what my colleagues and I do is really quite pretentious -- arguing for an aesthetic perspective on education, teaching courses on aesthetic evaluation or the theory of continuing education, and giving this paper -- all are pretty solemn activities. All claim to matter a great deal. But many of our most solemn antics are very important and are gradually changing the face of our discipline; I find the machine-technology craze to be quite solemn and overrated, but I do not deny its importance; behavioral objectives, a rather solemn attempt to make measurable order out of rich diversity, are seriously influencing our way of operating in education (and outside of it); the back-to-basics movement is undeniably important in forcing us to re-think the purposes of schooling; I subscribe to Ms. magazine, though I find it tendentiously solemn. Solemn need not be silly, serious need not be exciting (or ever important), and, of course, the distinctions might well shift over time. And sometimes the solemn simply provides the reassurance we want: it's a lot more interesting to have a mid-life crisis than simply to make a job decision.

The usefulness of the distinction, if it has any at all, will be to free us to look at our usual efforts as if from the outside, to ask questions we don't always have to ask, to put our research temporarily into an unfamiliar context and test its durability there. Applying the distinction to anything we do in education may not necessarily change our judgments about our discipline at all. But having the criterion available as a test of our perspectives now and then may

occasionally relieve us from the burden of always having to take ourselves so seriously all the time. And it should make the reading of the AERA program a lot more enjoyable.

Sources

Baker, Russell "Why Being Serious is Hard" New York Times magazine, 30 April, 1978

Bullough, Edward "Psychical distance" as a factor in art and an aesthetic principle. in Aesthetics: Lectures and Essays (Stanford: Stanford University Press 1957)

Koestler, Arthur The Act of Creation (New York: Dell Publishing Co. 1964)

Kozloff, Max Renderings: Critical Essays on a Century of Modern Art (New York: Simon & Schuster 1968)

March, James G. "Model Bias in Social Action", Review of Educational Research 42:4, August 1972

Pepper, Stephen C. The Basis of Criticism in the Arts (Cambridge:Harvard University Press 1945)

Reich, Charles The Greening of America (1970)

Sheehy, Gail Passages (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co. 1976)

Slater, Philip The Pursuit of Loneliness (Boston: Beacon Press 1970)

Sontag, Susan On Photography (New York: Farrar, Straus, & Giroux 1977)